

12.
*The Lost Sheep, Piece of Silver,
and Prodigal Son.*

BEING THE
S U B S T A N C E
O F A
D I S C O U R S E

Delivered in the
County of *Antrim* in *Ireland*.

In the YEAR 1750.

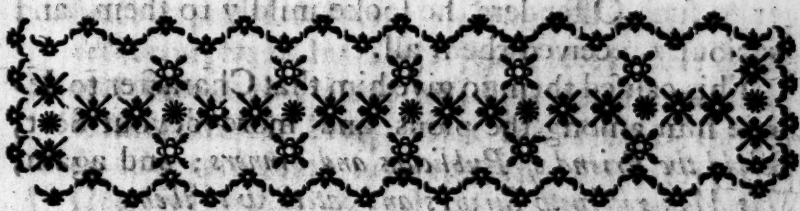
By JOHN CENNICK.

*Jesus said, I came not to call the Righteous but Sinners
to Repentance, Mark ii. 17.*

*Behold the Friend of Publicans and Sinners, Luke
vii. 34.*

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THE
Lost Sheep, Piece of Silver, and
Prodigal Son.

LUKE xv. 2.

This Man receiveth Sinners.

IN this Chapter we have an Account,
that during *Jesus's* Ministrations and
Preaching all the Publicans and Sinners
drew near to hear him, which so offend-
ed the religious Jews that they mur-
mured and shewed their Displeasure,
because he suffered such a Rabble to follow him, and
more, because, instead of exclaiming against these
ungodly People, whose wicked Lives and Sins were
known to all, and instead of thundering out the
Curses of the Law to them, or shewing the just An-

ger to such Offenders, he spoke mildly to them, and graciously received them all.

This caused them to give him that Character to describe him among the pious and more devout Sort, *Behold the Friend of Publicans and Sinners*; and again, *This Man receiveth Sinners and eateth with them.*

I suppose this served to prejudice many of the righteous Scribes and Pharisees against him, because they had always shunned the persons he was familiar with, and had esteemed them as Bastards and not Sons of *Abraham*, and who were under the Curse, *Children of Belial*, and excommunicate; they knew no Righteousness but that of Works, and which consisted in observing the Law and being strictly obedient to all the Precepts of *Moses*, as the Rabbies explained them; and to these they had added many of the Traditions of the Fathers, in relation to their often praying, making Profelytes, washing their Hands before Meat, and when they came from Market, &c. beside a Multitude of Ceremonies, in observing which they placed much Holiness, and condemned vehemently such as were not so scrupulous and rigid, because without it they hardly believed a Man could be safe. They had carried the Matter so far, that the End of the Law was not answered, but, as our Saviour says, *was made of none Effect through their Traditions*; for they made their first Blunder in supposing at all, that Righteousness came by the Law, and that the Dispensation of *Moses* was calculated of God to make Men righteous, whereas the sole Intent of the Law was, to convince every Man that should hear it, that he was a Sinner, and under the Curse justly; it was ordained to stop the Mouth of every Man who would fancy he was blameless and had a good Heart, and to make all the World guilty before God. In this respect

spect it paved the way for the *everlasting Righteousness* brought in by *Christ Jesus*, because it condemns and curses every one who has not continued in all Things and in every Point and Title of the Law to do it; and since no Soul can escape so rigorous a Condemnation, but all are guilty, and have sinned more or less, and may have no Hope from the Law, nor can be justified thereby, the Soul who would willingly be saved, and who is conscious of his Sin and of his being under the Curse of the Law justly, who sees that it aims and strikes at the Heart, condemns the least Thought and Desire, and requires a *worshipping the Lord with all the Heart, with all the Mind, and with all the Strength*, I say, when this is known, and which is clearly the End of the Law, the Soul sinks down before God, and cries out, *What shall I do to be saved? Whither shall I go for Mercy?* and thus sees and feels the need of a *Saviour* and of Redemption from under the Law, and of a better Righteousness than our own. Hence it is that the *Holy Ghost* sent Prophets and Scribes instructed out of the Kingdom of Heaven to teach such Men to look to Him (the Messiah) and be saved. They taught, *He shall be called the Lord our Righteousness. In his Days shall Israel be saved. They shall be saved with an everlasting Salvation. He shall finish Iniquity, make an End of Sin, obtain Reconciliation, and bring in everlasting Righteousness. To him shall all flesh come. To him shall the gathering of the People be. He shall save Israel from all his Sins.* This served to enlighten such as cried to him in their Trouble, and who sat in the Shadow of Death, and comforted them with Hopes of the Redeemer, for whom the sincere Jews looked and waited, willing to see his Day till he came. But in the Jewish Church there were Men who had otherwise interpreted

preted the Law, and preached, that it could make the
 Observers of it righteous; and this Sort prevailed
 exceedingly, so that the chief of the Priests and the
 learned Men where of this Mind, and these were cal-
 led the *Pharisees*. St. Paul and many of our Savi-
 our's Disciples were of this Sect before they knew
 him, but none could be in his Company and not
 observe, how in all his Doctrines, Parables, and
 Discourses he sharply condemns the Righteousness of
 the Pharisees, and says, *they have their Reward,*
and that except we get a better Righteousness than
theirs, we can in no case enter the Kingdom of Hea-
ven, calling all that they boasted of a *whitening of the*
Wall, painting and garnishing Sepulchres, and wash-
ing in the Outside of Cups and Dishes, i. e. it was an
 outward and affected Righteousness, it was good in
 the sight of Men, and adorned and made white the
 Person who had it before the World, but it did not
 go deep, it did not wash the inner Man of the Heart,
 it did not cleanse the spoiled and bad Nature, nor
 make the Soul *all glorious within*. This only is ef-
 fected by an immediate Work of Grace, through
 the Inspiration of the Spirit and sprinkling of the
 Blood of Jesus. This is a divine Work, and with-
 out which all Righteousness is *filthy Rags*. This is
 sure and certain, if there could have been a Law gi-
 ven which could have made Men righteous, then
 Righteousness had come by the Law of Moses; but
 it was impossible, considering our Fall and inbred
 Sin, to have been made righteous by any Law, or
 Works, or in any way but by that means which our
 tender and merciful Father, God, contrived before the
 World began, and that was by means of the Blood
 and Wounds of his Son Jesus, and by his Obedience
 to the Death of the Cross.

It

It was Men ignorant of this great Design of the God of Abraham, and who had received the false Opinion that was common in those times, of their being more righteous than others, and of being saved by Works, that stumbled at seeing Jesus receive Sinners, and which made them slight and blaspheme him on that account; but it is to be observed that to vindicate his Conduct, and to unfold before all the World the Counsel of God, and his mind to save Sinners, he delivers three Parables, in which the Love of the blessed Trinity to lost Man is described and exhibited in an uncommon Manner, and of which I purpose to speak particularly To-day. Would to God all that hear me might be happily convinced, the Self-righteous, that they have hitherto mistook, and now come and buy of Jesus Raiment and be cloathed indeed, and made righteous in his Sight, whose Eyes try the Hearts and Reins, and the Profane and Careless, that they may leave all their old Ways, and fly to Jesus and be saved, for *this Man receiveth Sinners.*

There are many thousands who (as I myself have done) make the same Mistake the Pharisees did, and place true Religion in a strict Life, in obeying the Letter of the Law, to which they had Traditions and Commands of Men, such as praying so many times a Day, fasting so often in the Week, going so much to Church, performing such a Task of Duties, &c. and with all together they make a Righteousness, and when they have served it up and made them Aprons, like Adam of these, they will not suffer the Thought that they are yet naked, but value themselves upon account of their Goodness, and despise others; and think, *God I thank thee that I am not so bad as other Men.* It is for their sakes, as well as to draw poor deluded Slaves of Sin to him, that Jesus delivered himself in this gracious manner.

O may he speak and write his Mind in this great Matter upon every Heart !

There are some Things chiefly observable in these Parables, and which must not be passed over unheeded. In the first Parable, which is of the *Shepherd and the lost Sheep*, the Love and Care of the Son of God is displayed ; in the second, which speaks of the *Woman and her Piece of Money*, the Diligence and Love of the Holy Spirit is shewn ; and in the third, which is of the *returning Child to his Parents*, the Love and Joy of the Father is expressed over a repenting Sinner. All are to set forth the Riches of the Grace of God to Mankind, and to prove to our unspeakable Joy and Comfort, that *this Man receiveth Sinners*, and rejoiceth over them who come to him, as a Shepherd over a Sheep that had strayed away, and which he has now found ; and as a Woman is glad to find a Piece of Money that she had lost, and as a Father rejoiceth to receive his Child again who had left him and was as if dead.

The holy Jesus when he preached this Discourse was surrounded with Sinners ; all were come to hear him, the ragged Thieves, the wanton Harlots, the stupid Drunkards, who had wasted their Estates and Health in a debauched and intemperate Life, the Usurers, the Swearers, and Sabbath-breakers croud attentive round the *Most Holy*. A far off and at a Distance stand the murmuring Scribes and the righteous and prudent People, who would have liked to hear him if such a dirty nasty Rabble were not his Followers, and if but the Great, the Genteel, and Rich would go too, or if the Rulers and Learned but approved of him, and if he did not countenance and encourage that wicked Multitude so much, or if he would but preach a little more against their sinful Ways, and commend a little more a courteous and bene-

benevolent Spirit, and preach about good Works and Charity to his Hearers, and tell ignorant People their Duty.

I suppose they beheld him with Scorn, and disdained to be one of that Man's Disciples. As *Michael*, the Daughter of *Saul* and Wife of *David*, looked out at her Window and saw her royal Husband dressed in an Ephod, and come dancing thro' the Streets among a company of Maidens before the Ark, and despised him, saying with a Sneer, *How glorious did the King of Israel look To-day?* so did these Men who murmured because *Jesus* received Sinners; they despised him for it with all their Hearts, and were offended. They were too good to join with those who found Mercy at his Hands; they were too wise to imagine they needed Repentance as much as they, or that they were upon a level in *God's* Eyes with the worst of all; they were too prudent to be ever seen with him, and so went away offended.

O ask your Hearts, my dear Friends, Have not you been of this proud self-righteous Mind? Have not you such a high Spirit? Look upon the Redeemer with all the Publicans and Sinners hearing him, and think, If you should not have been ashamed to be among them? However it has been, now blush at his Feet and pray him to forgive you your false Prudence, your Self-righteousness, and Pride, and sit down at his Feet in Spirit, and hear the gracious Words which proceeded out of his Mouth.

He begins, *What Man of you having an hundred Sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the Wilderness and go after that which he hath lost until he find it? and when he hath found it he layeth it upon his Shoulders rejoicing, and when he cometh home he calleth together his Friends and*

Neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me for I have found my Sheep which was lost: I say unto you, that likewise Joy shall be in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just Persons who need no Repentance.

This Parable our Saviour seems to address to the murmuring Pharisees, but in the hearing of the Sinners, that both might be edified, the one learn Humility, and see how equal the Saviour's Ways are, and the other who had wandered, learn how glad their Shepherd is at their Return, and so come back to him and be saved.

Jesus is the Man who, of all his vast unmeasured Stock, lost one poor Sheep. All the Heavens and every World, visible and invisible, with all their Hosts are his; this World compared to the Creation is only like a drop of the Bucket, or like a Grain of Sand in the Ballance, or like one Sheep in Comparison of an hundred. If a Man should let a Drop fall from the Bucket he would not think of it, and if a Man had an hundred Sheep and should lose one, which should be chased away by a Wolf, or borne away By a Lion or a Bear, he might easily let it go, and think, it is better to lose it than I risque my Life in search of it, or loose many Days time and spend much Labour and Pain in the Pursuit of it, especially as he had yet so many left; but our Good Shepherd thought otherwise; the greatness of his Kingdom, the innumerable Worlds which were his, and all the Inhabitants of the Heavens, the Angels and Spirits which are beyond all Number, could not make him think little of the Loss of this poor World, when Satan like a Lion entered the Fold, and led astray, like a Sheep, Adam and his wretched Posterity; our Shepherd saw it from on high, nor would let it pass easily, it lay from Eternity upon his Heart, and in due time he

he became their *Saviour*. An Hireling might have let the wandering Sheep perish, and only thought of the ninety and nine who were yet in the Pastures; but a good Husbandman would rise up early and travel far, would leave his Flock in the Fields and seek carefully that which he had lost, he would search every Hill and every Valley, enquire through every Plain, and spare no Pains till he had met with it, and should he find it torn by Dogs, dirty with driving through Bogs and deep Places, he would not therefore leave it, but would bind up the Wounds, wash off the Filth, and lay it upon his Shoulders, and come home joyfully; he would tell his Friends and Neighbours of his Success, and not reflect upon all his fore Labour in seeking it, since he had now got it again safely. This is the Heart of our *dear Saviour*; he put on the Form and Office of a Shepherd, left all his Angels, all heavenly Worlds and blessed Spirits, and came a thirty Years Journey into this World to seek his lost Sheep. Often the *Sun burnt him by Day and the Frosts consumed him by Night*; often he sat down weary, and travelled through the Wilderness weeping as he went, and when he found his Sheep it was in the Hand of the *Enemy*, in the Mouth and Jaws of the devouring *Lion*, the *Dragon* had seized it, and was ready to make an End of it; to redeem it, it cost him that severe Conflict in the Garden, when he wrestled till his Sweat was like great Drops of Blood falling down to the Ground; nor did he leave it, but continued in the Combat till his Back was sore and bloody with scourging, his Head torn with the Thorns and Bryars of the Wilderness, and till his Hands and Feet were cut through and loaded with Bonds and Chains. In this Condition he was when his sore Hands caught the Prey out of the Destroyer's Teeth, and with

his rent and bruised Feet he trod down the *Dragon* and the *Lion* upon the Mount of *Calvary*, and laid down his Life for his *Sheep*. This is that dear *Saviour* who, when a Soul repents und comes to him, takes it upon his Shoulders, there he bears their Burden and Sorrows, and carries it in his Bosom and in his loving Arms, and when he has washed the polluted Sinner in his precious Blood, and forgiven him, when he has healed him of those Wounds which caused him such Smart and Misery, and given him his Peace, then he lets all his Saints and Angels know, *I have found the Sheep which I had lost, rejoice with me, for the Lamb that went astray is returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of his Soul. The little one that had wandered away from me, and for whom I have travelled and been in Pain, he that caused all my Grief and Labour, the Child that you once saw in mine Enemy's Hands, and who warred against me, he that trampled under Foot my Words, and would not receive my Reproofs so long, is come back to me!* This causes a new Joy among the Angels, and this begins properly when a Sinner is come to our *Saviour* by Faith, and receives the Knowledge of his Salvation; it is repeated when he lands safely above, and shall be again renewed when *Jesus* shall divide among the People as a Shepherd between his Flocks, and when he shall be found at the Right Hand with the Sheep, and thenceforward shall that Joy be continued through all Eternity.

Also as a Man rejoices more over a lost Sheep when he has recovered it safe and sound, than over all the others which went not astray, so has our *Saviour* more Joy over a poor Soul which had left him, and over the World which was lost but is now found through his Redemption, than over all those Spirits who kept their first Estate, and more than
over

over all the Angels who have not sinned, and so not needed Repentance, and far, far more than over all those self-righteous People who glory in their strict Lives from their Youth up, and dream that they need no Repentance. O that those who hear me would To-day rise up and leave all and follow their true Pastor. What Joy would you cause in Heaven! and in the Breasts of the Angels of God! and what Joy would our Saviour have to see so many wandering Sheep return home to him? It was for your sakes chiefly this Parable was spoken. My guilty Brethren and Sisters be encouraged thereby to return to him who made you, and whose Sheep (though spoiled and strayed) you are, and you shall be received by him with Joy everlasting. Let your Hearts answer, *Lo! I come to do thy Will my God.*

The second Parable is after this manner: *What Woman having ten Pieces of Silver, if she lose one does not light a Candle and sweep the House, and seek diligently till she find it, and when she hath found it, she calleth her Friends and Neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me for I have found the Piece which I had lost: Likewise I say unto you there is Joy in the Presence of the Angels of God over one Sinner that repenteth.*

In this Parable our Saviour teaches the Care and Diligence of the Spirit to seek and win back Souls to the Lamb. Under the Similitude of a Woman is the Holy Ghost described in other Places of the Scripture, sometimes as a Mother, a Nurse, a Comforter, and that in the Prophets as well as in the New Testament; for Instance, *As a Mother comforteth her Son, so will I comfort thee.* When Solomon spake afar off of the Holy Spirit's new-bearing the Church of God out of the Side of the second Adam, he says, *Under the Apple-tree (so was Christ crucified called, because*

because he excelled all the Sons of Men, as the Apple tree did the Trees, and which gave Meat to the Hungry, Drink to the Thirsty, and Shadow and Rest to the Weary and fatigued) *thy Mother brought thee forth, there she brought thee forth that bare thee.* Again, *My Beloved is the Only One of her Mother.* Our Saviour confirms this in saying, *Ye must be born again of the Holy Ghost.* Also in another Parable he speaks of the *Holy Spirit* when he says, *The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Woman who took Leaven and put it into three Measures of Meal, till the whole was leavened.* It is the Office and Work of the *Holy Ghost* to minister to the Saints in the Name of *Jesus*; he comes in his Name and dwells with them; he takes of the Things of *Christ* and shews it to them; he glorifies him in them, and above all, it is the Place of the *Spirit* to take the *Leaven* of *Christ's* Body and Blood, and hide it in the three Measures of Meal, that is, in our Body, Soul, and Spirit, and like as Leaven works and operates thro' the Meal till all is fit for Use, so is the *Blood of Jesus* conveyed to a Believer, which continues to operate through Body, Soul, and Spirit, till all the old Nature is purged away, and we are fit for our *Heavenly Father's* Use; or, as *St. Ignatius* says, till we become pure Bread for our Beloved. This is sweetly expressed in a well-known Prayer? "Grant us, gracious Lord, so to eat the
 "Flesh of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, and so to
 "drink his Blood, that our sinful Bodies may be
 "made clean thro' his Body, and our Souls washed
 "thro' his most precious Blood, and that he may
 "evermore dwell in us and we in him."

The *Holy Ghost* loves us even as *Jesus* loves, and is one with our Saviour in our Salvation. He looks upon us dearer than Pieces of Silver, and more valuable than fine Gold. As a good Mother of the
 House

House seeks when a Piece of Money is dropt, and ceases not her Cares and Search till she has found it, and then rejoices with her Friends, so the *Holy Ghost* lights a Candle in the Heart, illuminates the Mind that was asleep, and the *foolish Heart that was darkened*. He causes a Ray of divine Light to shine within, brings a Beam from the flaming Eyes of *Jesus* into the close Recesses of the Soul; he exposes all the hidden Sins, the nasty Corners, the dangerous Place in which the Soul, like a Piece of Silver, is lost; he sweeps away all the outward Sins, the Rubbish of Gaiety, Pleasures and Lusts; he cleanses the outward Man, and will not let it suffice till the poor lost Piece of our *Saviour's* Treasure is found and counted among his Jewels. In this Labour is the *Lord the Spirit* employed, often many Years, and with indefatigable Patience he strives with Souls till he has prevailed and brought them to *Jesus*, and then is there Joy in the Presence of the *Angels of God*. He does not grudge all the Years in which he called the Soul and waited to be gracious; he forgives the Sin of quenching the Light, and loving and choosing to walk in Darkness, the resisting his divine and maternal Motions, and preferring earthly Things to heavenly, and inspires all the Angels with Joy at the Conversion of the Soul, whom he esteems Treasure, and the very Reward of *Jesus*, the Hire and Wages of our *Saviour*, his Riches and Jewels. O may we all be of the happy Number, when he shall count them up, and they shall be to him for a Crown and a Diadem and an eternal Glory.

The *third Parable* is of the *Father and his Prodigal Son*, and is the most lively Picture of the Heart of *God our Father* towards his younger rebellious Sons the Children of Men.

It was Man that was so foolish as to leave his Father's House and go out and spend his Portion of Grace in riotous and careless Living in the World; ever since the Fall of *Adam* we have done thus, we have lived in a *far Country*, in an Estate afar off from the *Lord*, and there *we have wasted our Substance*. As in the Parable the Son is said to *spend all in riotous Living*, so does every Man: one trifles away his precious Time in Play, another heaps up Riches and can't tell who shall gather and enjoy them, and others who put on a more sober Appearance live still at a Distance from their *Heavenly Father*, and perhaps content themselves, like the Paodigal Son, *with the Husks which Swine do eat*, with the Things of this Life, or with the false Religion which consists only in Name and Shew, and is not really the Knowledge of *Christ* and his Love in the Heart. The Departure of the Son at first of his own Choice, sets forth our Free-will, which is to wander perpetually, and teaches, that our Fall was of ourselves. *O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself*. But our Saviour describes the Son at Ease, and pleased with his Luxury and Wantonness among Harlots, till *there arose a Famine in the Land and he began to be in Want*. This is when the Eyes of a Sinner are opened, and he sees to what all his Sins have brought him, into what Misery he is plunged and sunk: There is a mighty Famine in the World in which he lives, *not of Bread nor of Water, but of the Word of God and of the Bread of Life*. He sighs that he has been so foolish to leave *the Lord his Father's House*, and begins to be in Want; he wants Forgiveness, he begins to want a Saviour, he is restless and uneasy, all his Sins afflict and trouble him, he wants Peace in his Heart, he begins to want a Rest for his Soul; and this Beginning of Want increases till *he hungers and thirst*

thirsts for Righteousness and is filled. He went and joined himself to a citizen of that Country who sent him to feed Swine, and he would fain have filled himself with the Husks, the Grains, which the Swine did eat, and no Man gave unto him. Thus our Lord describes their State who, when a little awakened to a Sense of their Misery and Want, get into Company and join themselves to the Men of this World, strive to divert away their Uneasiness, and get out of the reach of his Voice who daily whispers, *Thou art poor and miserable, come unto me.* By his feeding of the Swine, we may understand all time-serving, all cringing to the lying and false World, and stopping to be the Vassal and Drudge of the Devil and the Servant of Sin. What are the *Epicureans*, the Sensualist, but Slaves? What is the Nobleman more than the Peasant who is a Captive to Wine and Women? What the General and Admiral, with all their Bravery, when conquered by Pride and Lust, and Bond-servants of their Passions? What are the Highest and Greatest more than the Beggar, the Soldier, or common Sailor, when they creep and bow to the World only for Gain, Pleasures, or Honour? They are Servants of Swine, and, as the Prodigal, would fain have filled himself with the Husks which they eat, so do they, and so have we all done. How have we strove to satisfy our poor Souls with their Diversions, and make ourselves happy and easy in their way but could not? All our Endeavours were mercifully blasted, and we rendered wretched more and more above measure.

It was in this State he recollected his Father's House; Poverty drove him to think of going back: He thought, *how many Servants hath my Father who have Bread enough, and I perish with Hunger? What though I have rebelled, and brought all this Misery*
 upon

upon me, I will arise and go to my Father, and will say to him, Father I have sinned against Heaven and against thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son, make me I pray thee thine hired Servant. This is just the Condition, and these the Thoughts of a true Penitent. He thinks, *O how happy are the Children of God! how happy his Servants the holy Angels! O that I had but the lowest Place among them! O that I might but have leave to call God my Father.* The Holy Ghost makes use of this Opportunity, and when Jesus has sought him out, and the Spirit has enlightened him thus far, he shews what a loving Father he has, who spared not his dear Son for him, and the poor Sinner trembles and cries, is afraid to ask Mercy, and dares not stay in the State he is in; he resolves at last to venture to him, and, like *Esther*, thinks, *If I perish I will perish at the Feet of the King.*

And he arose and went. He did not only propose it, but did it. There are many who often speak and think of it, but never go, they stay and perish afar off; but lo! he comes, and his Father saw him a great way off, and had Compassion on him, and ran and fell upon his Neck and kissed him. O mark every Word, my dear Friends, and be astonished at the way in which our Saviour describes his Reception; he does not say, the Son ran to the Father; he was weary, faint, and ashamed, and could not, nor did he see his Father first, but his Father him, and then neither did he send a Servant to order him to depart, and let him know he would not see him or own him; he did not upbraid him with his vile and scandalous Behaviour, with his disgraceful Life, and just Warrant and Beggary, but *ran to meet him.* It seems as if he had been looking out for him, and often with wishful Eyes watching the way he went, to see if his
poor

poor Child would once return, and now he meets him, *falls upon his Neck and kisses him.* With what Emphasis and Affection does our Saviour express the whole? He was fit to describe *his Father's* tender Heart; he knew it and he only, and thus he does to our great Comfort.

When a poor self-condemned Sinner sets his Face towards Zion, and comes trembling back, however vile in his own Eyes, *God the Father* beholds him with Joy. He has long looked down on the Children of Men to see if there were any that would turn, and though the poor Soul don't at first discern the Lord, yet the Lord sees him *afar off* in his sad and lamentable State, he views him *weary and heavy laden*, he understands his Heaviness, his forlorn and destitute Condition, surveys his Poverty and Wants, and has Compassion on him, he pities him as a Father pities his Son, he runs, he makes haste to help him. As a Father meets his only Child whom he had bewailed for dead, or given over for lost, and falls upon his Neck and kisses him, so *our Father* receives his poor Children, he embraces them and kisses them upon Heart and Soul, he makes his Love felt, and kindles such a Love in his Childrens Breasts as can never be extinguished or forgotten.

The Son began to say, *Father I have sinned, and am not worthy to be thy Son,* but had not time to ask a Servant's Place, for his Father prevented him by saying to his Servants, *Bring the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring upon his Finger and Shoes upon his Feet, and kill the fatted Calf and let us eat and be merry, for this my Son was dead and is alive again, was lost but is now found.*

The Wretch that beggared himself with Harlots, and did not deserve the worst Garment, must have the best Robe; and he that had squandered away so

much Gold that he never deserved to see the least of it more, now must be adorned with a *Ring*, and his Feet must be shod, and a Banquet, a Feast prepar'd, that all the House might share in the Joy of the Father.

Thus and thus shall it be done to you, my dear Brethren, who return for Mercy to your Father; the *best Robe*, that is, the *Righteousness of Christ*, shall be brought to cover you, and to make you *all-glorious within*, this shall be your *beautiful Garment and white Robe*. He shall put the *Ring* upon your Finger, you shall be favoured like *Thomas*, to put your Finger into the Nail prints of *Jesus*, and be convinced he is your *Lord and your God*, that shall seal you to the *Day of Redemption*, and you shall know what that means, *his Hands are like Rings of Beryl*; your Feet shall be shod with the Sandals of Peace, that you may go on your way rejoicing. The great Marriage Supper, the Feast of the *Sons of God* above is preparing for you, and all is to welcome you home. But come, and all the Angels, the Prophets, the Martyrs, and Apostles of the *Lamb* shall hear your Father confess you. The Moment you give him your Heart, the Moment when he shall kiss and forgive you, *God, your dear Father God*, shall say before all his Children and Servants, *This my Son was dead but is alive again, this your Brother was lost but is now found*.

Thus does our *Saviour* preach to the Publicans and Sinners: and what Parable or what Discourse in all the Bible so sets forth the free Grace and Love of the whole *Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*? Let it affect you, my dear Friends; remember they are the Words of *Jesus Christ*, and are spoken to you, and let it force you to go after him, and compel you to come into his Church and be saved.

saved. He is the same good and gracious Lord as when he spake these Words and suffered the Sinners to hear him; his Aim is the same, it is to save Sinners and to win them to him; his Mind is the same, he would have it yet be preached, *that this Man receiveth Sinners*, and all who preach it shall find his Words *true and faithful*, and he will prosper them in their despised but glorious Office.

In the latter Part of this last Parable our Saviour describes another Brother, who at hearing the Joy of his Father's House because of the returning of the Prodigal, instead of being glad with them murmured and was angry with his Father, *and would not go in*, but pleaded his obedient Behaviour, and complained, *that he had never so much as received a Kid to make merry with his Friends*, but when this Man was come who had spent his Substance with Harlots, the fatted Calf was killed, and all the House filled with Musick and Dancing, and he was offended, and would not enter the House till his Father came out and intreated him. There is no Envy or Emulation among the Angels and Sons of God in Heaven, because a Sinner is converted; but among some of his People upon Earth it may be found, and some who have seen the Happiness of Souls, snatched as it were, out of the Burning, and made glad in the Lord's Salvation, have been moved with self-righteous Risings: They can think, *I am sure I have lived a very strict and obedient Life, and never run to that Excess of Sin with these, and yet I never experienced this Joy and Transport, nor have I felt this Love and Happiness they speak of*, and such murmur. They have in the Heart somewhat of the same which our Saviour mentions in another Parable, wherein some who labour'd through the Heat and Burden of the Day, murmured against the good Man of the House, because he had

given

given others who had only been called into the Vineyard in the last Hour of the Day, the same with them, and had even paid the last first; but our *Saviour* makes his Dealings just by saying, *Cannot I do what I will with my own?* And in this same Parable he makes the Father reason with the other Brother, till his Self-righteousness died away and he was convinced of the Meetness and Justice of his Father's Dealings with his younger Son, and then he came in. Thus our *Saviour* would have his self-righteous Children learn, that he is a Sovereign, and can do what he will with his Mercy and Grace, and that there is often more Trouble to get one of these into the House than the Publicans and Sinners. It was this nasty Spirit ruined the *Jews*; it made those offended to whom *Jesus* addresses the latter Part of this Parable; it hinders many to be saved who stand cavilling and quarrelling with *Free Grace*, till they blaspheme, and stumble at the *Stumbling-stone*. It makes it difficult to bring home even an awakened Soul who unhappily is fallen into this Spirit. It is hard for such to get to Heaven. But one thing I must observe, the Father entreated even his offended and murmuring Son to come in; may he do so with all of his Mind; may he convince them of his just and true Ways, and make them glad to be saved freely themselves, and glad that their *dear Saviour* will receive Sinners. All our own Righteousness is caused by Ignorance of our Estate and Nature. When *Jesus* opens the Eyes of the most innocent, he is thoroughly convinced he has no real Good in him, and is humbly thankful *that this Man receives Sinners*. He is not stumbled at the many Places where the Scripture preaches the Justification of the Ungodly, of being saved freely, or by Faith alone, but he thinks and sings,

How

How glad am I that thou so loving art,
 That thou canst bless my base and worthless Heart,
 And canst freely bear with my whole Behaviour,
 O wert thou not exactly such a Saviour,
 What should I do!

May we all experience the Care of our *Good Shepherd*, the Faithfulness of the *Holy Ghost*, and the tender Love of the *Father* to our own eternal Welfare, and to the honour of the *Lamb*; to whom with his *Father* and the *Holy Ghost* be Praise for evermore.
Amen.

An H Y M N.

1. **I** *Lord* the *Prodigal* have been,
 My Substance I have spent in Sin;
 I now my youthful Follies see,
 And naked mourn my Misery.
2. My Innocence, my spotless Dress,
 I've lost, and all my Righteousness;
 Reduc'd and made a Stranger here,
 Nothing but filthy Rags I wear.
3. With Men I oft' have sought to join,
 Would fain have eaten Husks with Swine;
 But O! their Joys won't do for me,
 'Tis empty all, and Vanity.
4. For Heav'nly Bread I pant! I pant!
 I know I now begin to want:
 None gives my hungry Soul to eat,
 None pities my forlorn Estate.

5. My

5. My Father's Servants happy are,
While I the Sinner perish here;
They have enough, nor Scarceness know,
Nor guess what Sorrow I go thro'.
6. I'll rise, and, wretched as I am,
I'll cry to him for whom I came;
Longer my Father shall not be
A Stranger to my Misery.
7. Behold a Sinner! Lord! I'll say,
Thy Son, who lately went away;
Mis'ry and Sin is all I plead,
And want of Grace and Heav'nly Bread.
8. See me tho' far from thee, and run
To meet thy poor returning Son,
And while I tell my wretched Case,
Fall on my Neck and me embrace.
9. Bring the best Robe, thy Righteousness,
And let my Feet be shod with Peace:
Seal with a Ring my trembling Hand,
And bring me to my native Land.
10. Let all thy Children now above,
Rejoice at thy redeeming Love,
O tell them, This my Son's forgiv'n.
And ransom'd to inherit Heav'n.
11. Grant this, my Father, and my Tongue
Shall mingle with the blessed Throng,
With theirs my Harp shall sweetly sound,
I once was lost, but now am found!
12. I dead in Sin remain'd, till God
Redeem'd my Soul from Death by Blood,
When he for all my Guilt was slain;
And now am I alive again.

29 MR 59

F I N I S.